

# Large Public Libraries

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JUSTICE LOUIS D. BRANDEIS once stated that there was a curse to bigness, and many a taxpayer and governmental official in observing today's phenomena of an expanding population will tend to agree. This great development of rapidly burgeoning and expanding metropolitan areas is bound to have both its problems and its benefits. The question is one of solving major problems in sufficient time to insure real benefits, for if the problems are not solved, at least in terms of library services, there will be a collapse of public library service as we have known it.

Rather we should think of the great future in the use of the book by the large reading public—student, businessman, worker, professional career person, general reader, and all the others who make use of their public library. But we shall have to do some careful thinking about the libraries of the future in terms of what kinds of libraries we shall have, who is to use them, what is to be the extent or limitations of the collections and services, how they are to be organized, how they are to be staffed, and of greatest importance, how they are to be financed. Four of the most difficult problems to be resolved are these: (1) resolving the dilemma of political boundaries which tend to make for small areas of service and which result from a local pride or provincialism; (2) organizing for area services; (3) staffing the libraries; and (4) determining an equitable financing of area library services.

Growth of urban areas has been significant: in 1790, five per cent of the country's people lived in 24 urban places; in 1960, 70 per cent lived in 6,041 urban places. This 70 per cent accounts for 125 million persons. As Hauser and Taitel have already indicated,<sup>1</sup> the population explosion in the metropolitan areas has been even more dramatic, and there are now, according to 1960 data, 211 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas which contain 112 million persons, or

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almost 63 per cent of the total population. By 1980 these areas will be even larger, and it is projected that there will be an increase of about 58 million persons in these areas. This figure would result in close to 70 per cent of the total population being so located. Therefore, if the metropolitan areas increase by 50 per cent in the next twenty years while the total increase for the country is but 37 per cent, we will have a serious, but interesting problem on our hands.

There have, of course, been significant changes in the last decade in cities of 100,000 or more people. In 1950 there were 107 such places; in 1960, 130. During this period, nevertheless, there was a loss in population in some of these cities, and four cities which qualified in 1950, did not do so in 1960. In fact, 42 other cities lost in popula-

TABLE I  
*Comparison of Statistics for Public Library Systems in Cities  
with Populations of 100,000 or More: Fiscal Years  
1950 to 1959<sup>1</sup>*

Fiscal Year	Operating Expenditures (Excluding Capital Outlay)			Volumes	
	Total <sup>2</sup>	Salaries (Including Building Staff)	Books and Periodicals	Number at End of Year	Number Circulated <sup>3</sup>
1	2	3	4	5	6
1950	\$ 56,767,000	\$40,498,000	\$ 7,146,000	49,636,000	146,625,000
1951	61,890,000	43,454,000	7,188,000	51,169,000	144,685,000
1952	67,751,000	48,094,000	8,491,000	52,517,000	151,544,000
1953	74,384,000	52,513,000	9,273,000	53,841,000	153,541,000
1954	77,507,000	56,491,000	9,643,000	55,566,000	163,888,000
1955	82,134,000	60,083,000	10,427,000	56,916,000	171,449,000
1956	88,952,000	64,286,000	10,893,000	58,090,000	178,788,000
1957	94,829,000	69,159,000	11,611,000	59,690,000	186,395,000
1958	101,085,000	73,199,000	12,050,000	61,921,000	200,888,000
1959	106,959,000	77,090,000	13,268,000	63,819,000	208,869,000
Per Cent of Change					
1950 to 1959	+88.42	+90.36	+85.67	+28.57	+42.45
1958 to 1959	+ 5.81	+ 5.32	+10.11	+ 3.07	+ 3.97

<sup>1</sup> Data for the Reference Department of the New York Public Library and for the Honolulu Public Library are excluded. Since figures are rounded, detail will not necessarily add to totals.

<sup>2</sup> Includes expenditures for other categories not shown separately.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, public libraries circulated films, sound recordings, and other audio-visual materials.

SOURCE: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: *Statistics of Public Library Systems in Cities with Populations of 100,000 or More; Fiscal Year 1959*. October 1960, p. 9.

tion while 58 gained—and some of the latter had startling increases. Roughly, the older cities in the East and Middle West lost ground; the cities in the Southwest and West gained. However, it is significant that there was no population loss in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. In fact, they gained by 48 per cent, while the cities as a whole increased only 9 per cent.

In some of these cities the increase was great enough to pose serious problems to existing libraries. For example, consider the problem of Houston with an increase in population from 596,163 to 938,319 and with a library expenditure of 65¢ per capita, or that of Anaheim, California, which in ten years increased in population from 14,556 to 104,184. The problem is not one of annual operating monies and services but also one of funds for capital growth—and for all city departments. Such increases call for orderly planning, and many municipal services are going to be taken care of before libraries. Faced with such problems, each metropolitan area should do careful planning of total library service on an area basis.

The trend of the last decade, which is likely to continue, indicates a steady rise in expenditures for large public libraries.

As the Library Services Branch has indicated, "Of particular interest is the 28.57 per cent increase in book stock (column 5) since 1950 as contrasted with the 42.45 per cent increase in circulation. Although expenditures for books and periodicals have risen 10.11 per cent from 1958 to 1959 (column 4), the actual number of books available in the large public libraries has increased only 3.07 per cent (column 5) during this same period. This small increase in book stock may be attributed to the increasingly greater cost of books (particularly nonfiction and reference titles) and to the rapid wearing out of books caused by a high rate of turnover."<sup>2</sup>

An additional reason for the small increase in book stock could be the heavy weeding of books because of crowded conditions resulting from lack of adequate stack space.

It must be pointed out that in the decade from 1950 to 1960, the total book stock increased from 49,636,000 to 63,819,000, or 28.57 per cent, while population in these cities increased from 47,382,000 to 52,226,000, or 10.22 per cent. Thus the increase in book stock has kept ahead of the increase in population for the large cities when viewed as a whole. Although individual statistics for all cities are not available at this writing, it is perhaps fair to say that those cities with the most rapid increase in population are not keeping up the same

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rate of increase for their book collections. Many of these cities had insufficient monies to operate 1950 libraries with 1960 budgets! For example, Houston with a 1960 population of 938,319 is spending \$61,700 a year for books, while Baltimore with a population of 939,024 spends \$310,100. The cities experiencing a population explosion are going to need outside help to meet their problems of capital outlay for both books and buildings.

Along with adequate facilities and proper staffing, the amount and kind of book stock determine the kind of services to be given any community. It is well known today, and the problem is becoming more acute with the rapid growth and merging of metropolitan areas, that it is the large public library that is attracting people from without the city, but within the defined metropolitan area, to the use, either for reference or circulation purposes, of the great resources of the large city library. Its collections of reference books, periodicals and serials, microfilms and educational films, government documents, and extensive collections of nonfiction, act as a magnet for the student and serious adult who, living outside city limits, can find no other public place to satisfy his reference and serious book needs. There is no substitute for the large public library.

As already indicated, there are a number of factors which are having a great influence upon the large public library. In 1960 there are more large cities than ever before, the greatest increase occurring in the West and South (twenty-one) with seven in the North Central states and one in the Northeast. The latter had three cities drop under 100,000 population and the South one.

At the same time, there was a loss in population in all of the twelve largest cities except Los Angeles, and most of these are located in the older areas on the eastern seaboard. It must be remembered, however, that the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area is still growing and that for the large city library the decline in population has not been accompanied by a decline in use. Rather the opposite has occurred.

In many cities, as a result of redevelopment and reclamation of older sections of a city and because of technological developments such as air conditioning, many cities are finding that the older citizens, having reared their families, are moving back into the city and enjoying comforts not obtainable before. They no longer face problems with transportation, keeping up of grounds, or trying to get maids to commute equally long distances; these and other reasons have

induced many older persons to return to the city. And the elder citizen is finding a better city, physically, to return to, as can be witnessed in such places as New Haven and Philadelphia. Not only are more older people moving into the city, but there are also more older people to serve.

The stringent laws relating to the amount of education, the raising of educational standards, the desire and need of more people to go to college have definitely raised the level of education in this country. It is well known that the higher the level of education, the greater the use of the public library. But the greatest effect to date upon this type of library has been the intensive use of the public library by the student—both in the secondary and higher levels of education. This striking use of public libraries is due to a number of factors, for example: (a) insufficient book stock in school libraries; (b) in many instances the nonexistence of school libraries; (c) lack of sufficient books in the college and undergraduate libraries; (d) lack of study or seating space in educational institutions; (e) restricted hours of opening of school and academic libraries as compared with those of public libraries; (f) disinclination of students to return to the school library after classroom hours; (g) lack of sufficient professional staff in the formal educational institutions; (h) change in educational methods and requirements, placing greater emphasis upon nontext materials; and (i) lack of understanding as to the true role of libraries, school, college, and public, on the part of educators. Many of these factors can be improved or eliminated as problems by librarians themselves, who are now being forced to this realization. It will, however, take an equally serious effort on the part of those in the field of formal education at all levels to arrive at a solution to our many library problems and the challenge of giving the best service we can to our many and varied patrons.

In more instances than not, it is only the large city library that has the resources that the metropolitan resident, living outside city limits, must have access to in order to fulfill his needs. The question resolves itself into one of who is to organize, provide, and finance this service. People in a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area live not only in the central city but also in the neighboring counties, adjoining states, and even, as in some areas such as El Paso and Detroit, in adjacent countries. It is a librarian's professional obligation to furnish as many people as possible with library resources, but it is also a librarian's responsibility to see that the cost of these services

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is met to a great measure by the governing unit in which the library user lives.

Almost as dramatic as the increased use of reference and informational services and the growth of the use of nonfiction collections, has been the sharp increase in the use of the telephone for reference and informational services, or to save a useless trip to the library if the specific book wanted is out of the library and being used by someone else. Because of the volume of telephone business, some libraries have established separate telephone reference service in order to avoid interference with the service to patrons already in the library. It is certain that telephone reference service is bound to increase.

Another significant and baffling problem facing the librarians of the largest city libraries is the nonuse of libraries by the largest per cent of the population. Registration figures for smaller cities and towns are always higher than for the largest cities. If metropolitan library service is developed extensively, it may be predicted that the outlying and neighborhood libraries will be used extensively for general reading and for quick information, but the large central library will be the active, heavily used unit for resources in depth, research, and housing the lesser-used materials. Both types are absolutely essential to good metropolitan service. Little in the way of effective studies has really been done concerning the potential use of libraries by nonusers, and more attention should be given to the problem.

Unfortunately, along with the population explosion has come a long period of inflation, and there seems to be no signs on the horizon of any leveling off of this inflationary spiral. Gone are the days of our thinking in terms of \$1.00 per capita library support; gone are the days when library school graduates could be hired at \$1,200 a year. Yes, we are handling more money each year, but are we really making the progress essential to good and adequate public library service? The answer can be a qualified yes, for while the population of the United States has increased in the last decade by 18.5 per cent, operating expenditures for large libraries have increased by 88.4 per cent, book stock by 28.6 per cent and home reading by 42.5 per cent. Part of this increase in expenditure for service and increased use has resulted from the organization and development of new library services and the strengthening of existing services, but a large per cent is the direct result of inflation.

Some of the largest library systems, e.g., Buffalo, St. Louis, Queens Borough, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Phila-

delphia, have increased their budgets by more than 50 per cent in the last decade. This increase has offset any inroad in the budget as a result of inflation, but capital growth within these cities may have offset some of the gains from an increased budget, for part of the increase would have been used to operate new agencies or services.

One of the serious fiscal problems about financing library service on a metropolitan basis is the inequality between the libraries involved, not only in the collections and services given, but also in the financing of these services. Small town or county libraries, not having great stock or specialized reference and research collections, do not have the fiscal obligations to service or provide them. In the Philadelphia area, the average per capita expenditure in 1959 for public library service was Bucks County 31¢, Chester County 34¢, Delaware County 39¢, and Montgomery County 80¢. Even Philadelphia's expenditures of \$1.71 were considerably below the average \$2.26 expenditures for libraries serving over 100,000 population. Equalization will have to come in the nature of state aid. There is no doubt that a means must be found to provide increased financing of metropolitan libraries in order to bring substantial financial relief. We cannot be placed in a position of denying information and education to our people whether in this generation or the next.

For many years we have talked about larger units of service, and it is only now that we are being forced into a situation that something is actually being done about it in an extensive way. Increased thought and study are being given the problem, and an excellent roundup on the subject is to be found in Part 2 of *New Notes of California Libraries*, Spring 1961, titled "Cooperative Planning for Public Libraries."<sup>8</sup> Here is to be found the current status of bibliographical and reference services with some emphasis upon complete collections. It is strange that the development of large library systems has not had greater effect upon over-all planning for library service than it has. Undoubtedly, the cost factor has been the greatest restraint upon the development of metropolitan systems. The systems found between city and county such as the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, the public libraries of Seattle and King County, Minneapolis and Hennepin County, Rochester and the Monroe-Livingston-Wayne Tri-County (Pioneer) System, Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, although not all have survived, have at least pointed the way toward larger units of service and a means for financing them. Indeed, twenty-six cities participate in a city-county library setup, examples being

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found mainly in the South and Middle West. But much more study is needed to determine the best method of servicing and financing.

At the moment, as indicated by Katherine Laich,<sup>4</sup> systems are developing along three levels: city, metropolitan or submetropolitan, and state. Eventually there will have to come under consideration the development of a fourth plan, i.e. national services. All the plans are to result from cooperative efforts and coordinated planning, and all the state and city plans are based upon three levels of service: local, regional, and central. The conception seems to be a sound one, with increasing emphasis being placed upon meaningful bibliographic, reference, and nonfiction collections being established at the regional level and with, of course, the central libraries having the extensive files and important titles needed on an area basis.

Although the various city plans are very similar in organization, the size of building and collection, the hours of opening, etc., vary considerably. Regional book collections vary from 37,000 in a Los Angeles city regional library to a proposed 200,000 in Philadelphia; from a building of 6,000 square feet in Los Angeles to 39,000 in Philadelphia. Obviously, planning is still in the experimental stage, and much thought should be given to the establishment of objectives, standards of service, collections, staffing, hours of opening, and square foot areas before a final evaluation can be made.

The development of the neighborhood branch as a general reading center has had interesting developments in recent months. The organization of Family Reading Centers in Brooklyn will be watched with great interest by the profession. It may well be, with the tremendous expansion of library services, that our smaller neighborhood libraries in the cities (and also in a state plan) will be staffed by nonlibrary school but college graduates, and clerical assistants. The regional center and central library positions, calling for a high degree of professional skill and knowledge, will be staffed by library school graduates. This kind of staffing will require the establishment, probably on a local basis, of a program for the training of readers' advisers and administrators of the neighborhood libraries. The neighborhood library staff would funnel to the regional library centers the patrons for reference, information, and the intensive use of nonfiction collections for subject use. The neighborhood libraries would then become centers for good, but general reading.

Such a plan poses a problem of reference service to children, and this is a factor to be reckoned with by both the school and the public



librarian. But perhaps of greater importance is the need for a full study of the total needs of the community before any one type of library goes too far in a single direction. The formation of a metropolitan library council to plan, organize, and develop total library service may produce noteworthy results.

The development of levels of service in the large metropolitan cities has its counterpart in several of the metropolitan library plans. However, the development of these systems calls for cooperation and local financing. As in Toronto, the individual libraries are to maintain their own identity when different libraries are involved and may have but two levels of service (as in Los Angeles County) or may depend upon one central library (as is proposed in Toronto). Baltimore County is to rely upon Baltimore City's Enoch Pratt Free Library, through a state contract, for its specialized resources and materials. Eventual developments must include all three levels of service, with state fiscal support, to insure complete library service.

Possibly the most exciting state plan for public library service is the one now (1961) enacted into law in Pennsylvania. The system will include *local libraries*, regardless of size, within 15-20 minutes driving time of each resident, which, if they elect to join the plan, will receive twenty-five cents per capita for each resident in the local political unit. *District library centers*, located within an hour's driving time of each person in the district, will receive in addition to state subsidy as a local library, an extra twenty-five cents per capita for each person in the prescribed district but outside of the local taxing authority. Finally, *regional resource libraries* would be designated within a one day trip for those wishing to use these resources, except for some very specialized subject materials, which would be located in one of four of these libraries. These resource libraries will each receive \$100,000 annually toward the building up of resources and services in this type of library. Of interest is that the Philadelphia regional libraries and the state district libraries will be of comparable size and with similar service goals. Thus, in the Philadelphia metropolitan area there can be close cooperation with the two kinds of libraries serving very similar functions. It is entirely possible that all states will not want a state program as extensive as that for Pennsylvania and that in certain regions of the United States a library plan based upon a multistate program will be a practical and economical approach to the problem.

An interesting proposal has been forwarded in New York for the

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development of reference and research resources in that state. Subsidized by state aid, this plan provides for the establishment of five regional reference and research libraries working closely together. It will be a part of the overall plan of library service for New York residents, thus supplementing the present plan of public library service.

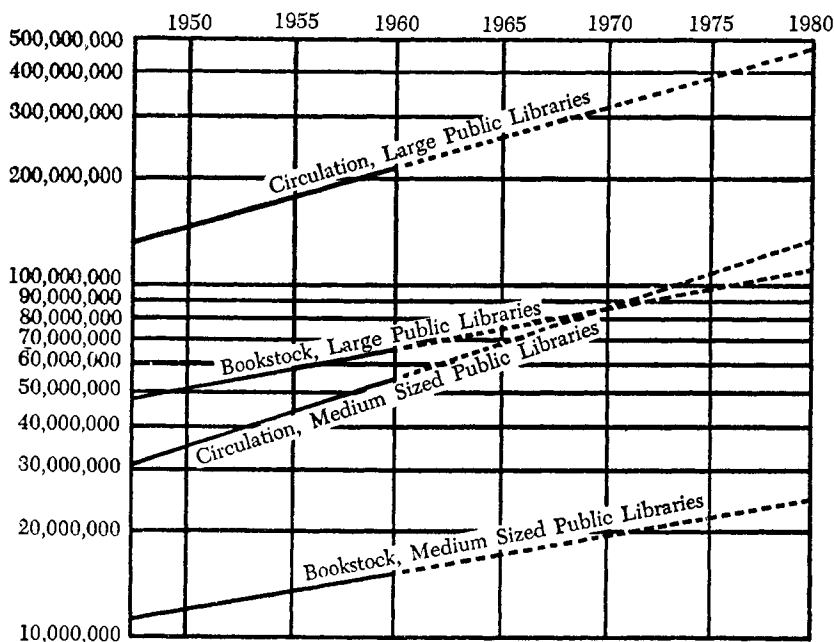
Both the Pennsylvania and New York plans are to use existing libraries—Pennsylvania, public and college or university libraries; New York, college, university, and special libraries. There still remains the study of the interrelationship of the elementary school requirements and to a lesser degree the secondary school, with the services of the public library.

Plans are wonderful, but unless their financing can be adequately taken care of, they will not accomplish their purposes. Development of metropolitan and regional services will require the combined fiscal efforts of local, state, and federal government. C. B. Joeckel years ago recommended a division of fiscal support—local 60 per cent, state 25 per cent, and federal 15 per cent. This is a neat division and should be a good base from which to operate. It is interesting to note that Maryland has proposed legislation that would permit the state to supply about 30 per cent of the cost for local library service. There is good reason from the point of view of the metropolitan library for some such division. No one metropolitan city area is within one taxing unit; all include one or more counties in their area, and several include two or more states in the territory included. It will take federal leadership to bring those involved together, to gather the information and statistics required to assess the situation, and to aid in the development of necessary legislation. Until this time comes, the only alternatives are informal cooperation, which really means trying to accomplish a program with no funds, or development of contracts for library service with neighboring communities or on a state-wide basis as in Maryland. But the \$64,523 which the Enoch Pratt Free Library receives by contract for supplying nonfiction to libraries in the state, while a good beginning, is not a significant sum with which to build up extensive collections and personnel for state-wide services.

An extensive public relations program must be developed to acquaint people with the problem of library service to the kind of population growth we are to experience in the years ahead. The growth of circulation and book stock has been steady in the last decade (see Table II), and there is no reason to believe that this growth will diminish.

TABLE II

*Growth of Circulation and Bookstock, Large and Medium Sized Public Libraries, Actual 1950 through 1959 and Projected 1960 through 1980*



Source: Figures for 1950 through 1959 from data in U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare reports, *Statistics of Public Library Systems in Cities with Populations of 100,000 or More*, and *Statistics of Public Library Systems in Cities with Populations of 50,000 to 99,000*.

The educational level of the population will continue to rise, contributing to a progressive increase in the use of libraries. National Library Week, which is likely to continue for the next few years, will not only keep people informed about library needs, but will also present the profession with an excellent vehicle to make library needs known to broad segments of the community. Librarians must also remember that library service is but one segment of local, state, and federal government and that other divisions of governmental services are also affected by the growth of metropolitan areas. Already some states have begun to study the problem through legislative committees. It behooves state library associations to be alert to such activities and

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to request the inclusion of library problems in the legislative studies.

In conclusion, there is no question of the continued growth of the United States and of libraries of all kinds within the country. Barring war, this growth will continue on a steady and increasing basis. Librarians, by watching the population changes, can plan accordingly. Their problem is, at one and the same time, to secure personnel, facilities, and funds for a growing use by present population as well as for future needs.

At this writing each Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area might be urged to create a Metropolitan Area Library Council to study, recommend, and coordinate the area library needs. These metropolitan requirements and recommendations should be coordinated with state planning in all the states involved. Included in the constituency of such a council would be representatives of all library systems and individual agencies relating to libraries such as union library catalogs, etc., and individual libraries, both public and private. In addition there should be lay and governmental representatives to insure a full representation from all groups involved.

As librarians look to the future of public library service in metropolitan areas, the trend seems to be, and with justification, toward the development of three levels of library service providing for (1) local but limited resources and services; (2) regional district services with larger collections and varied, more intensive services; and finally (3) large collections, with emphasis upon reference books, serial publications, educational films, and intensive nonfiction collections with subject specialization to meet area needs. It is to be hoped that a means will be found to coordinate the services and resources of other libraries into a well integrated pattern that will answer the needs of the library public of tomorrow with service that will measure up to both their quantitative and qualitative needs.

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